

MAURICE D. HINCHEY
26TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

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AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT,
FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION,
AND RELATED AGENCIES
INTERIOR

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3226

March 26, 2002

The Honorable Ward Todd, Chairman
Ulster County Legislature
County Office Building, 6th Floor
244 Fair Street
Kingston, NY 12401

Dear Ward:

I am writing to voice my unequivocal support for Ulster County joining the Hudson River Valley Greenway. I understand that under your leadership the Legislature will be deciding the important issue of membership in the Greenway in the near future, which I believe provides an important opportunity for Ulster County.

As you know, my involvement with the Greenway dates back to the mid-1980's, when I authored and introduced the original legislation that created the Greenway programs. The Greenway was designed to encourage sound regional planning and foster economic development using a "bottom-up" approach. In this way, the Greenway encourages community participation and cooperation in preserving and enhancing the significant scenic, natural, historic, cultural, and recreational resources of the Hudson River Valley.

The Greenway has provided more than \$1.8 million in grants and assistance to Hudson Valley communities since the passage of the Greenway Act in 1991. It has also recently received another \$1 million to distribute for the Hudson River Watertrail. The Greenway has helped to galvanize an unprecedented volunteer collaboration including efforts to improve access to the Hudson River, link trail systems in the Valley, and promote "smart" economic growth. I was able to convince Congress to designate the Hudson River Valley a National Heritage Area, in large part due to the existence of the Greenway regional planning and development program. Becoming part of the Greenway may also make Ulster County a more attractive candidate for New York State's proposed Rivers and Estuaries Center.

When originally drafting this legislation, I intended this program to be a voluntary one. Incentives, such as technical and financial assistance, are provided to municipalities who decide to join. These communities are able to tap into the Greenway's expertise in planned growth and resource preservation and are eligible for state and federal funding for local projects. These communities retain their power to make local decisions and may leave the Greenway at any time. The fact that none of the 157 municipalities that have joined the Greenway have chosen to withdraw is testament to the clear advantages of the program, as well as the program's sensitivity to the needs of local governments.

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
2431 RAYBURN BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-3226
(202) 225-6335

BINGHAMTON OFFICE:
100A FEDERAL BUILDING
BINGHAMTON, NY 13901
(607) 773-2768

KINGSTON OFFICE:
291 WALL STREET
KINGSTON, NY 12401
(845) 331-4466

ITHACA OFFICE:
123 S. CAYUGA ST., SUITE 201
ITHACA, NY 14850
(607) 273-1388

MONTICELLO OFFICE:
(845) 791-7116

The Greenway was also clearly designed to be consistent with community "home rule." Communities are encouraged to participate in a process of regional planning that is cooperative and mutually beneficial. They are not required to take any actions that are not supported by their residents and their representatives. Greenway does not "take" private land holdings nor overrule local decision making, as some have suggested.

I believe that Ulster County will greatly benefit from being part of the Greenway, and this is an excellent time to join. Eleven municipalities in Ulster County have joined the Greenway, with Rosendale and Marbletown the most recent additions. Nine out of the thirteen eligible counties in the Hudson Valley have also joined the Greenway. Dutchess and Westchester Counties have taken the next step and joined the Compact, which opens up additional resources and funding opportunities. Four other counties are following this lead and are at some point in the Compact approval process.

The Hudson Valley Greenway Act passed both houses in the New York Legislature in 1991 with strong bipartisan support. Both the Republican led Senate and the Democratically controlled Assembly recognized the historic opportunity provided by the Greenway and worked together to pass this legislation. I will always be grateful to former State Senator Jay Rolison and now State Senator Stephen Saland for their strong leadership in moving the Greenway legislation through the New York Senate. It is my hope that the Ulster County Legislature will act in a similar manner under your leadership and take advantage of the Greenway by approving membership.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide additional information.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Maurice D. Hinchey", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Maurice D. Hinchey